

NEW JERSEY COLLEGES:

WOMEN'S DIVISION OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Douglass College, Which Acquired Present Name Last Year, Honors Educator Who Led Statewide Fight That Resulted in Founding the New Jersey College for Women in 1918

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

MABEL SMITH DOUGLASS, a young and handsome golden-haired Jersey City matron, saw little in common between her College Club and the State Federation of Women's Clubs but out of courtesy to the Federation she accepted an invitation to attend a district meeting in the fall of 1911. That day a golden flame began to glow against New Jersey's academic sky.

Mrs. Douglass came instantly alive as the speaker of the day urged admittance of women to Rutgers, to provide higher education "irrespective of sex." The speaker was the pilot light; Mrs. Douglass was the flame. She left the meeting, carried her burning enthusiasm to any crossroad in the state where anyone would listen and finally in 1918 badgered New Jersey into begrudging establishment of New Jersey College for Women.

Last spring New Jersey College for Women shed its old name and agreed to love, honor and obey the name of Douglass College. Some offered excuses for the change—"people ask if N.J.C. means New Jersey Chamber of Commerce," "they think we're a teachers college," "people think we're a junior college." No one needed excuses or apologies; this college beside the Raritan was and is Mabel Smith



Mrs. Mabel Smith Douglass, first dean, from a painting.

Douglass's college. The name change served to make it official for the ages.

SUCH a blunt statement foments no serious disagreement. Many others worked with and after Mrs. Douglass but her ability to wrap others in her flame without burning them counted as her prime asset. Virtually everything at the college—the high academic standards, the intense campus traditions, the physical look of the campus itself—derived from the sparks thrown off by an amazing woman.

If Douglass College did nothing but sit back and reflect the luster of its foundress, it would do her spirit ill. Name change was a minor, albeit sentimentally correct, milestone in the life of the college. Douglass College must get on, because as of next September Douglass will be face to face with that specter of completely-filled facilities feared by all institutions of



Elizabeth Rodman Voorhees Chapel on the Douglass College campus.

higher education. It's almost tomorrow at Douglass.

Often it's difficult to bear in mind that this women's college is simply a "co-ordinate" branch of Rutgers University or Rutgers State or whatever the State University of New Jersey eventually gets to be called. Firmly established on its own spreading campus, clearly delineated by college traditions which have only moderate relationship to Rutgers, and identified by a distinctive name, Douglass College confuses many who think it to be both private and independent.

It is neither. Not one of the 9,500 alumnae has ever gotten a sheepskin from either New Jersey College for Women or Douglass College. The degrees are Rutgers degrees. Perhaps the confusion stems in part from the apparently cheerful willingness of the State of New Jersey to let private funds carry a large share of the college for many years. As one prime example, the state has not built one

new building on its women's college campus since 1926—unless the recently completed \$100,000 garage-repair shop can be called an item of scholastic necessity.

DOUGLASS COLLEGE is, and always had been, a residential liberal arts college. Its dormitories house nearly five out of six undergraduates, making the matter of expansion intimately tied to dormitory facilities if Douglass is to retain its character. Last September an entering class of 440 freshmen broke all college records. Next fall that number can't increase more than about 100 before Douglass is up to full dormitory capacity and a full enrollment of 1,300 students.

Dean Mary I. Bunting, only the third dean in the college's history, has faced that problem ever since she became dean July 1, 1955. She has a strong college; insured by the intense leadership of Mrs. Douglass between 1918 and 1932 and the sound

This is the seventeenth of a series of articles which not only describe New Jersey's colleges and universities, but tell the story of the growth and traditions of individual colleges within the state, picture their roles in modern education and explain how they plan to meet what has been called "an impending tide of students." Next Sunday: Drew University.



Interior view of chapel during candlelight ceremony, annual event started during college's first Christmas. Note fireplace at left.

judgment of Dean Margaret T. Corwin in the troubled world years from 1934 until 1955. Against this background of established strength, Dr. Bunting sets a statistical yardstick to see the future of the college.

The statistics are completely New Jersey attuned. Mrs. Bunting has learned a lot in her few months in the state. She knows, for example, the disturbing fact that half of the young women in the top quarter of the state's high school graduating classes never go to college. She knows that New Jersey will graduate twice as many high school students in 1968 as now—and if Douglass College merely continues to accept its present percentage (about 2 per cent) of graduates, enrollment must double to 2,600 by 1968.

But can Douglass College merely remain static? The new dean believes five times, rather than twice, as many New Jersey women may seek admission to Douglass in 1968 when out-of-state colleges find themselves hard

pressed for space for their own students. How long can Douglass go on with facilities to accept only about 2 per cent of the state's women graduates?

IF this sends shivers dancing up and down the spines of taxpayers, the tingling impact is only in the best spirit of Mabel Smith Douglass. She never sugar coated a fact, although with her bright locks and good looks and cultured charm she made people digest her facts, whether they liked them or not.

After the State Federation meeting lighted the golden flame in 1911, Mrs. Douglass started at the top to get answers to the question of why Rutgers as a beneficiary of state and federal funds did not admit women students. She saw President Wilson, Governor Fielder (a Jersey City neighbor), leading national and state politicians. She interviewed anyone she could see at Rutgers. She gave hundreds of addresses in high schools,



"Gibbons Campus," one of two residential establishments consisting of 52 houses, each of which accommodates 12 to 20 students.

clubhouses, private homes and Grange halls. If anyone would listen, Mrs. Douglass would talk.

Others in the State Federation of Women's Clubs took up the torch when Mrs. Douglass collapsed from fatigue in 1915. The State Federation fairly earned its nickname of "fairy godmother" to the college. Finally, Rutgers trustees acted in April 1918 to establish a college for women as a "co-ordinate" branch (meaning the college would enjoy university privileges but its female students wouldn't spoil the all-male atmosphere of Rutgers classes).

Mrs. Douglass, by 1918 a young widow of 41, with a 13-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son, accepted the deanship—and started New Jersey College for Women with a Bible, a dictionary and her sparkling boundless energy. Aided by her registrar, Mrs. Elizabeth N. Greene, Mrs. Douglass accomplished the miracle of converting the leased John N. Carpender house into a college building by September. She hoped 10, or maybe even 15, students would apply.

FIFTY-FOUR young women trooped up the walk to ivy-covered Carpender mansion (College Hall) to begin classes on September 19, 1918. Two weeks after opening, a devastating influenza epidemic forced a shutdown for three weeks. Doors reopened, but a favorite indoor sport throughout the first year was debating what college to attend when the New Brunswick college died.

Death didn't come. Mrs. Douglass acquired the Drury Cooper house across the street from College Hall (the Carpender house). Cooper Hall had two claims to fame: It brought N.J.C. its not universally beloved appellation of "The Coop" and it symbolized visibly the rambling growth of an institution.

Naturally when Rutgers men picked up their dates at Cooper Hall they talked of the "Cooper girls" and, just as naturally, "The Coop" was their home. Today all of Douglass College is "The Coop" to Rutgers men across town. When name change was being

debated, the Rutgers student paper with tongue in cheek urged official adoption of their pet name for the college.

Cooper Hall served as dining hall, infirmary and second dormitory (with some girls housed in College Hall). Increasing enrollment forced an addition to Cooper the second year, the third year, the fourth year. Cooper Hall grew eastward on George St. to Nichol Ave., south on Nichol to Redmond St. and then west again on Redmond to join the original building. One professor in the early years suggested that in view of its annual growth, Cooper should have been painted red and called "The Crimson Rambler."

NEW JERSEY College for Women already had surprisingly deep roots by the time the first class of 42 young women received degrees in 1922. The old Carpender barn had been converted into a science hall, private homes had been leased for dormitories near Cooper Hall and a temporary wooden gymnasium had been built. That gymnasium deserves a closer look, since no one ever discusses Douglass College without getting quickly to the question: "Tell me about that gymnasium built of packing boxes."

The gymnasium stands as a tribute to the ingenuity of Mrs. Douglass but it is in no way a notable memorial to the attitude of the proud State of New Jersey toward higher education. Its sides are the same boards once made into packing boxes to carry Liberty airplane motors to France but bought by the college when World War I ended. Still "temporary," the gymnasium is not the worst in the world, but the trees shielding it off from the rest of the campus are not misplaced.

The intense interest of the State Federation of Women's Clubs in the infant college brought Federation Hall in the summer of 1922. Dwarfed in size by modern college buildings, Federation Hall seemed to Mrs. Douglass "more like a monument than a mere

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Dean Mary I. Bunting and Dean Emeritus Margaret T. Corwin pictured during campus stroll. Dean Bunting succeeded Mrs. Corwin in 1955.



One of traditions is the May-night ceremony observing "arrival" of freshmen to point of wearing red and walking the "Sacred Path." Left: "Language" house, subject stimulator for Spanish students and (right) Ravine Bridge, famous boy-meets-girl spot on campus.



DOUGLASS COLLEGE

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classroom building." Donations from many people over a period of many years went into Federation Hall, still a very useful campus structure, by the way, and one which set the architectural style for the campus.

MRS. DOUGLASS waited until her first class was graduated and Federation Hall was built before she carried her golden flame to Trenton to seek something more tangible than maintenance funds. She won agreements from three consecutive governors that New Jersey had no right to rely on private individuals to build everything on a state university campus. Between 1923 and 1926 the state gave funds for three buildings called Science, Recitation and Botany. The generosity ended at that point; not a single classroom or student building has been built since with state funds.

Friends flocked to aid the new college. Leonor F. Loree, noted railroad executive, gave funds to build Antilles Field and contributed other funds as well as a great deal of his time to New Jersey College for Women. Nevertheless, no friend deserves to be remembered more than James Neilson, the beloved old neighbor who seemed always near whenever Mrs. Douglass or her college needed help. "Our Fairy Godfather," Mrs. Douglass called him.

Need money? Mr. Neilson gave freely, including the money to pay for College Hall. Need ground? Mr. Neilson gave nearly all of the land in the present 100-acre campus. Need a spokesman? Mr. Neilson used his influence to convince many people of the value of the college. Need a friend or a place to sit and relax? Mr. Neilson threw open his fine big mansion, "Wood Lawn," and entertained the college family at any hour and in any season. Hundreds of girls came to know and love Jimmy Neilson and when he died in 1937 at the age of 93, his gift of his home for college use

prolonged the memory of happy hours at Wood Lawn.

UNIQUE at Douglass College, even though copied on a modest scale on some other campuses, are the small separate home like dormitories. The 1,000 girls who live on campus occupy 58 houses, an average of about 18 girls per unit. Dormitory life in the usual sense of large institutionalized buildings is missing at Douglass.

The uniqueness exists partly by chance. Mrs. Douglass first visioned a large single dormitory housing scores of girls but she realized she couldn't borrow money for the project. Instead, she bought a small plot of ground on Nichol Ave. and in 1922 built 12 residences on a horseshoe-shaped drive. Each residence could easily be converted into a private home, a factor which Mrs. Douglass recognized would be highly attractive to money lenders—in case the college failed, of course.

Life in the individual houses proved so satisfactory from any point of view that the college eventually built a total of 28 on two horseshoe drives off Nichol Ave. and put up another 22 on 12 acres of ground donated in 1926 by James Neilson. Mr. Neilson named the new development "Gibbons Campus," honoring the memory of one Mr. Gibbons, who ran a canal boat of the old Delaware & Raritan Canal and tethered his mules where the campus now bears his name. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, five brick dormitories, divided into eight units, were built on Jameson Campus near Cooper Hall. These carried out the tradition of small residential houses, although each Jameson unit has 27 to 40 residents.

MRS. DOUGLASS summed up "the early history" in 1929. The flame lighted in 1911 burned inextinguishably. Incredible things had happened. The undergraduate student body numbered more than 1,000 young women in 1928 and land and buildings were valued at six million dollars. The State Federation of Women's Clubs had nearly finished its new music

building and the Mary Kingsland-Mary Willetts Infirmary neared completion on Jameson Campus. New Jersey College for Women in one decade had grown from nothing to one of the 10 largest women's colleges in the nation.

Yet nothing pleased the college and its founder more than the white-spired chapel built in 1926 from a bequest left by Mrs. Elizabeth Rodman Voorhees. Mrs. Douglass long had been a friend of Mrs. Voorhees, often they talked of how Mrs. Voorhees might help—a loan for some houses, a large dormitory, some unrestricted funds? In her will, Mrs. Voorhees left 1½ million dollars for the chapel.

Mrs. Douglass built the chapel of her dreams and of her girlhood remembrances, a chapel with a high dome and red carpets and high-backed white pews. Voorhees Chapel today is an exquisite perpetuation of what Mrs. Voorhees and Mrs. Douglass planned together — "just as our thoughts builded it," Mrs. Douglass wrote.

Death finally stilled in 1933 the restless energy and the intelligent devotion of Mrs. Douglass to her college. It is not far amiss to say that few individuals have ever left on a campus the impress of this golden-haired woman with a vision. She shaped the physical appearance (only one major building has been built since her death). She encouraged virtually every tradition the undergraduates honor. She set for all time the high academic standards of her college.

SUCCESSING any president with a long tenure of office is difficult; succeeding someone like Mabel Smith Douglass at the depth of the worst depression the country has ever known could seem like an almost impossible task. Trustees moved slowly in selecting the successor, appointing Albert E. Meder Jr. (present dean of administration of Rutgers University) as acting dean between 1932 and 1934 while they deliberated on a permanent choice.

Dr. Margaret Trumbull Corwin, sec-

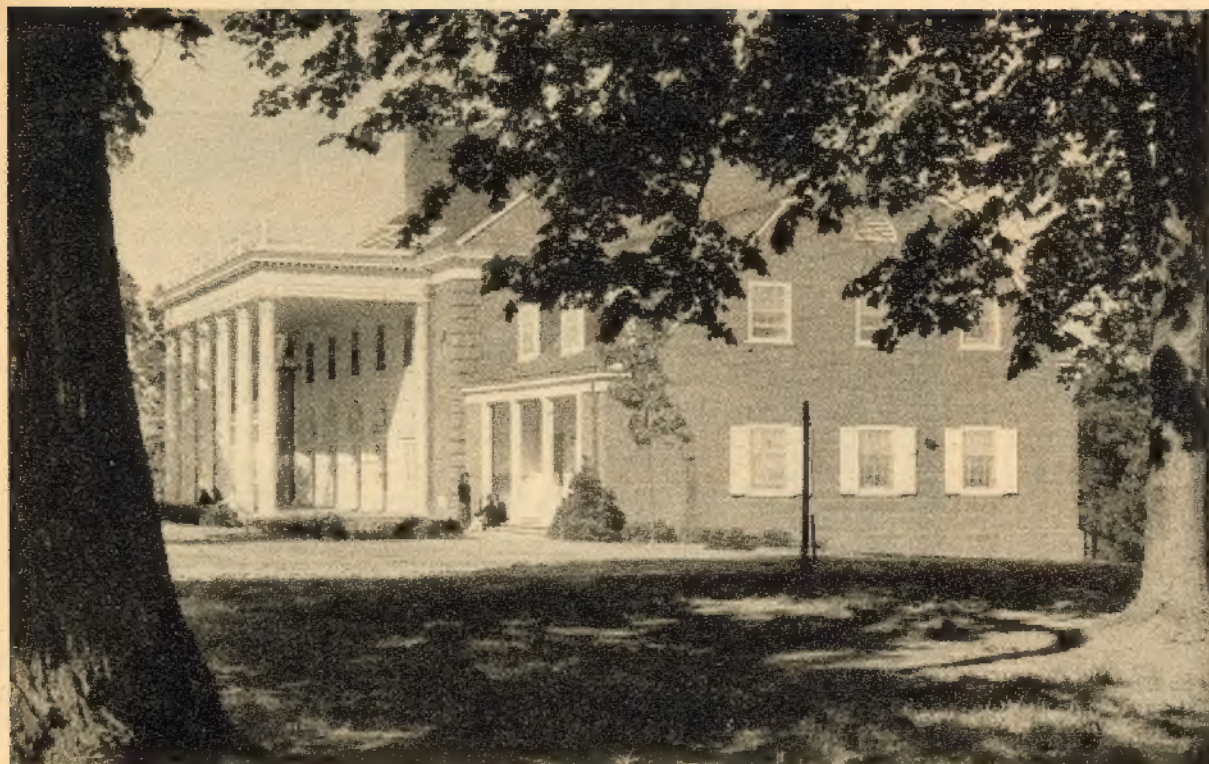
retary of Yale University Graduate School from 1919 to 1934, came to head New Jersey College for Women in 1934. She remained as dean until — succeeded by Mrs. Bunting in 1955—serving a 21-year period as difficult as any in all collegiate history. This was a period of depression, of World War II, of intense post-war readjustment, a period when building programs on most campuses closed down to almost nothing. State funds declined in the depression years and Dean Corwin concentrated on maintaining the college as a sound and vigorous liberal arts institution.

Observers credit Dean Corwin with avoiding "fashions in curriculum" during a period when many colleges put curricula on and off like new hats. Dean Douglass founded the college, shaped it to her ideas, made it respected in all New Jersey. Dean Corwin carried the reputation of New Jersey College for Women beyond the state borders, and through her own initiative gained international recognition for the college.

WHAT Douglass College is today, then, is essentially a blend of the personalities and the leadership energies of two women. Academically speaking, Douglass is renowned among educators. It is primarily a liberal arts college, offering more than 30 distinct major fields of study in the liberal arts curriculum—ranging from art, bacteriology and botany to Spanish, speech and zoology.

Douglass has striven always to make its education as stimulating and personal as possible. Nothing better illustrates this than the three modern language houses—"L'île de France," "Luzmela" and "das Deutsche Haus." These have been in existence since the late 1920s, and are aimed to make a student live a language as well as learn it. Students live together in the individual "language" houses on the dormitory campuses, eat together in Cooper Hall and at all times when together speak only the foreign language they are studying.

In addition to its wide liberal arts offerings, Douglass also has several



Student Center, made possible by contributions of alumnae, State Federation of Women's Clubs and friends, is known as "living room of the campus." Right: Music Building, built in late 1920s with funds raised by the State Federation, college's "fairy godmother."



specialized professional and pre-professional curricula. These include elementary and secondary education (nearly half of last year's Douglass graduates who took jobs are teachers), home economics, journalism, pre-medical, pre-nursing, agriculture, ceramics and engineering. The last three are departments of the Rutgers Men's Colleges, but are open to Douglass undergraduates.

THE affiliation with Rutgers University has very real values, over and above the social stimulation of having a men's campus in close proximity (if a mile and a half across town can be called close). Many Douglass undergraduates spend a great deal of time "across town" in the men's classes, seriously pursuing studies which they couldn't get on their own campus. Last year a Douglass senior even participated in the usually all-male ROTC program. Occasionally, too, a fortunate Rutgers male takes a course at Douglass but he is a far greater rarity than a Douglass girl would be on the men's campus.

The quality of the Douglass under-

graduates can be in part measured by statistics. Of this year's freshman class, 50 per cent placed in the top tenth of their graduating class (28 girls stood first in their classes). More than 80 per cent came from the top quarter. Quality can be stressed in admissions, since three girls apply for every one who can be admitted.

Douglass does not forget its obligation to New Jersey girls, including those who might not be able to attend college elsewhere. Although the strong dormitory traditions might indicate students come from far away, more than 90 per cent of all undergraduates are from New Jersey. As far as financial aid is concerned, nearly one girl in three works while at Douglass—and about 85 per cent of all undergraduates hold summer jobs. In addition, Douglass offers approximately \$185,000 in annual scholarship aid.

BUT who dwells on statistics in the midst of the tradition-filled life in Douglass College atop the shale cliff above the Raritan River? Tradition spreads over the campus as a blanket

pulled over and tucked in by the hand of Mrs. Douglass—because it was she who had the uncanny ability to recognize the start of a tradition and to encourage its continuance.

The honor system always has dominated life at Douglass (or N.J.C.) Beginning with the earliest years, undergraduates took all examinations under the honor system. When the many individual dormitory houses came into being in 1922 and after, the impracticability of having a house mother in each dormitory has put undergraduates on their own honor to an unusual degree on a woman's campus. The system works; Douglass undergraduates are treated as responsible adults—and they respond as adults.

Traditions, traditions, everywhere, and all of them old and logical. Commuters are called "Bees" because in the old days as they gathered together they sang a popular song about a "bee-ee-ee who sat on a wall-i-all-i-all." They meet in the Bee Hive to relax and study and eat lunch and they periodically invite the college to their "swarms." No freshman dares wear red in any shade nor does she

dare tread on Sacred Path in front of College Hall.

THREE days of all traditional days linger long in the memory of any Douglass girl, linger long after the names of textbooks are forgotten. First is Campus Night, in the fall when fires sparkle on the bluff to welcome alumnae back to the campus. At Christmastime, the campus brims over with house decorating and parties, with everything climaxed by the impressive candlelight ceremony in the chapel. Finally, in the warmth of a May night, the entire college family gathers on Chapel Drive to celebrate the "arrival" of freshmen to the point where they can now wear any shade of red and can walk unchallenged on Sacred Path.

Traditions now center in some measure in the \$600,000 Student Center completed in 1953. Called "the living room of the campus," the center was built with funds donated by the alumnae, the State Federation of Women's Clubs and many other friends. Here students congregate to plan and conduct most student activities, to meet a date at the snack bar or to relax in group fellowship before a roaring blaze in a fireplace.

Perhaps more than anything else at Douglass College the fireplace symbolizes the living warmth of Mabel Smith Douglass. The college probably has more fireplaces than any college in the nation, a tradition dating from the time the first class gathered to sing Christmas songs near the fireplace in College Hall. Mrs. Douglass correctly recognized that the flames warmed the spirits of the undergraduates even more than their bodies.

She insisted that forevermore a fireplace should be available wherever students gathered to relax or to think. Today fireplaces are everywhere—in every dormitory, in the Student Center, in the "Bee Hive," even in Voorhees Chapel. When an undergraduate dreams noble thoughts in front of a fireplace, she is close to the spirit of Douglass College—fired to greatness by the golden flame, dancing on to destiny.



In dormitory (above) or "Bee Hive" (left), the fireplace is found everywhere at Douglass.